

This Is Our Father's World

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Our present-day American society possesses a great awareness of and concern for our natural environment. Various organizations such as the Sierra Club and The Wilderness Society energetically promote the cause of the preservation and improvement of the earthly environment. Americans recycle various items such as paper, glass, cans, and plastic as a way to conserve our natural resources. Many manufacturers on the packaging of their products indicate their concern for the environment. The packaging, I noticed, on one product had a statement entitled "Our Environmental Commitment." Some supermarkets indicate their concern by statements regarding the environment on the bags they use. Various individuals show their concern for conservation and the physical environment by displaying bumper stickers on their cars. One such sticker reads "Think globally, act locally." On a national scale each year April 22 is promoted as Earth Day. The founder of Earth Day, Gaylord Nelson, former governor of Wisconsin and United States Senator, in calling attention to the preservation of the environment speaks of mankind's "war against the planet." The United States government safeguards the environment in various ways, one of them being by means of the Environmental Protection Agency. Thus it goes. One could continue citing one example after another of ways in which our society is environmentally-minded.

Specifically, what are some of the concerns which are receiving attention in the great environmental movement of today? Among the main concerns is the fact that the ozone layer is being destroyed by man's use of various chemicals. Another major concern is that the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is increasing year by year. Then also there is the concern over the depletion of our natural resources with which is associated the push for energy conservation. The problems of mercury pollution in lakes and streams, contamination of ground water by various chemicals, acid rain, lead poisoning, and littering are all receiving much attention by environmentalists.

Certainly there are many environmental problems that our present-day society faces. What is the root cause of all of these problems? What should our position toward the physical creation be? Also, how should we as Christians view all of this concern for the environment and current environmental movements and efforts to preserve it? Obviously the answer to these questions must be based on the Scriptures.

Whose world is this? Genesis 1:1 states "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Psalm 24:1 teaches us "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein." In addition, in Colossians 1:16 we read with reference to Christ: "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." As Christians then we know and confess, based on the instruction of God's Word, that this is our Father's world.

Furthermore, with respect to God's creative work, Genesis 1:31 instructs us "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good..." This world then as made by God was perfect. All was beautiful and harmonious. Obviously the physical environment was without blemish or problems and was perfectly suitable for all living creatures.

In addition to this world being created by God and being good, it is important that we remember that it was created for a purpose. That purpose is stated in Revelation 4:11 where we read "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." The physical world then being created by God belongs to Him and exists for His pleasure.

Man then is living in God's world not his own. God has created man and placed him on earth to have dominion over it and its creatures and to subdue it. Of this we read in Genesis 1:26 and 28. Thus

man is God's servant placed in the earthly creation to be God's steward and caretaker over that creation all with a view to the honor and glory of the Creator.

Man, however, did not remain in his original state of righteousness. He fell into sin and because he did so the world is under the curse. (See Genesis 3:17-19.) This then explains all of the environmental problems which we find in the world today. The root cause is sin. Man is now totally depraved by nature. Being totally depraved he is not motivated to use and preserve this creation out of a concern that it belongs to God. Instead man seeks himself. If in one way or another it is to his advantage to pollute or destroy the earth, he will do so. Man, walking in his ways of sin, misuses and abuses God's world and in doing so brings numerous environmental problems upon himself. Man in his greed has wantonly cut over the forests and mined the earth destroying the beauty of the earth and bringing about problems of erosion. In his unconcern for the health of human beings and in his carelessness he has polluted the atmosphere and contaminated lakes and streams. Thoughtlessly and carelessly and in his laziness he litters the streets and highways with old tires, bags filled with trash, McDonald's bags and cups, cans, gum and candy wrappers, cigarette butts, only to name a few items.

As Christians we must ever be mindful of the truth that this is our Father's world. We have the calling that was cited previously in Genesis 1:26 and 28. We are to exercise ourselves day by day as stewards over God's creation. Being stewards over that which is not ours, we may not squander, abuse, litter, or destroy our physical environment. This means we must not be wasteful with or destructive of our natural resources. We must use wisdom and care in the use of chemicals and in the disposing of them so as not to contaminate groundwater, lakes, and streams with them. We may not litter our city streets and the countryside with our trash and debris.

In addition to acting as wise stewards of God's creation, the Christian must take seriously his calling to be a responsible citizen of his country. We must obey the laws and regulations which have been enacted regarding pollution and littering. Suppose our neighbor decides to dump his trash on our property or to ruin that which belongs to us. Don't we become irritated or angry? We ask what right has he to do this to our property. Furthermore since there are laws prohibiting this type of behavior, we may contact the authorities regarding such matters. What right have we then to litter, waste, or destroy that which belongs to the King of all heaven and earth, the Creator and true Owner of all things?

How should we as Christians then view all of this concern for the environment and current environmental movements and efforts designed to preserve the earth which are being put forth by unregenerated men? The problem with all of this concern and with these efforts is that the underlying motivation is wrong. Do you hear them speak of the physical creation as belonging to God? Do they speak of being wise stewards of God's creation? The answer emphatically is "NO." The unbelieving world does NOT recognize God as the Creator of all things. Therefore it does NOT recognize the earth as belonging to Him and of our being stewards in God's world. Unbelievers rather are concerned about matters pertaining to the environment for man-centered reasons. They want the physical environment preserved so that man's earthly existence may continue and that it may be as enjoyable an existence as possible. They want an existence upon this earth as free as possible from environmental woes and problems for themselves and for their children after them. They give no thought to their responsibility to use this world and its resources to the honor and glory of God.

It should also be pointed out that in addition to having the wrong motivation, there are those who use unlawful means in their efforts to promote the cause of the environment. Protestors forming blockades in front of nuclear power facilities is one example. The breaking of the law can never be condoned as a means of achieving the goal of preserving the environment.

May we as Christians live day by day in the realization that our world belongs to our heavenly Father. We must take our responsibility seriously as God's children that we are His servants in a position of stewardship in His creation. May He give us grace and wisdom to care properly for that which rightfully belongs to Him. The next time you are tempted to litter by dumping McDonald's bags

or cups, by tossing a pop can out of a car window, by throwing gum or candy wrappers on the ground, or to waste paper or any of our natural resources in any way, remember.....THIS IS OUR FATHER'S WORLD.

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